

Public Notice – Environmental Project

PURPOSE OF NOTICE:

The Department of Environmental Quality seeks public comment on the state's response to the environmental aspects of a proposed management plan in Prince George County, Virginia.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

October 27, 2014 to November 13, 2014

TYPE OF RESPONSE:

Federal Consistency Determination

DEQ is reviewing the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Prince George National Wildlife Refuge to determine whether the plan would be consistent with the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (VCP) established pursuant to the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. The VCP seeks to protect the quality of air, water, and other natural resources in Virginia's coastal area.

NAME OF AGENCY PROPOSING THE PROJECT:

U.S. Department of the Interior: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has prepared a draft proposal for managing the James River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) for the next 15 years, pursuant to federal laws governing National Wildlife Refuges and requiring plan reviews and updates. The James River NWR covers 4,324 acres along the southern bank of the lower James River in Prince George County.

The draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (Draft CCP/EA) considers three management alternatives, each of which addresses habitat protection and management, cultural resources, and public use and access:

- Alternative A ("current management," or no action): This alternative defines current management activities, including those planned, funded, or underway, and serves as the baseline for comparisons with Alternatives B and C. It involves maintaining the 2,653 acres of pine-dominated forest, with emphasis on protecting nesting and roosting bald eagles and other native species; monitoring invasive species presence; and collaborating with partners for wildlife protection and population monitoring. USFWS would continue accommodating public archery and shotgun deer hunting in the fall; and allowing visitor uses including observation, photography, and environmental education.
- Alternative B ("manage forest health with pine-dominated component; new, enhanced, and focused public-use opportunities" (preferred alternative): This alternative would emphasize management of specific refuge habitats to support species whose habitat needs would benefit other species of concern. It would include promoting transition of 2,561 acres of former pine plantation toward mature pine savanna, with understory for resident and breeding ground-nesting species, several of which are mentioned in the EA. Cultural resource protection would also be enhanced, and visitor services improved.
- Alternative C ("Manage forest health with hardwood conversion component; new and expanded public use opportunities"): This alternative would emphasize management of specific habitats to support priority species whose habitat needs would benefit other species of conservation concern found in the area. USFWS would manage as much as 57 acres of non-forested upland for

wildlife habitat and administrative purposes. USFWS would promote transition of 2,609 acres of former pine plantation toward an oak/hickory/pine forest. Cultural resource protection would be enhanced, as in Alternative B. Modest increases in hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and interpretation would take place.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service states that the proposed project is consistent with the enforceable policies of the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program.

HOW TO COMMENT:

DEQ accepts comments from the public by e-mail, fax, or postal mail. All comments must include the name, address, and telephone number of the person commenting and be received by DEQ within the comment period. The public may review the project document at DEQ's central office in Richmond.

CONTACT FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS, DOCUMENT REQUESTS, AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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